

**datsuraku), an idea that became a cornerstone of Dogen's system of meditative practice. The following passage contains instructions on meditation practice (zazen), which in Dogen's system is based on the experience of "not thinking" (hishiryo). In the state of not thinking, a meditator moves beyond discursive and dichotomizing thought (shiryo), transcends the tendency to stop ordinary thought by suppressing it (fushiryo), and thus enters into a spontaneous awareness of reality in which thoughts flow along of their own accord. In this state of spontaneous mindfulness, the meditator experiences his or her own "buddha nature," an inherent propensity toward enlightenment that is shared by all beings.**

**The Rinzai (Chinese: Lin-chi) school of Zen is renowned for its use of koan, riddles that cannot be answered by rational or discursive modes of thought. The following passage contains the koan that is generally given to beginning students, referred to as the "Mu koan." It reports that a monk asked the Zen master Joshu if a dog has the buddha nature, to which Joshu answered, "Mu!" Mu may be translated as "not," but in the koan Joshu's answer is not a denial, but rather an indication that the question makes no sense from the point of view of enlightenment. The dilemma behind the**

question is based on traditional Japanese Buddhist ideas about the path. It is widely accepted in Japanese Buddhism that all beings—including dogs—have the buddha nature, or an inherent potential for buddhahood. Thus, from the point of view of tradition, Joshu's answer should be "Yes." But since Zen claims to transcend blind adherence to tradition, this would be an unacceptable answer. On the other hand, if Joshu were to state that dogs do not have the buddha nature, he could be accused of contravening Buddhist doctrine and setting himself above the buddhas.

Thus Joshu's answer is an invitation to move beyond tradition and conceptualization to a direct perception of truth. The Zen tradition refers to this koan as the "closed opening" or the "gateless barrier," because once a meditator perceives the meaning behind Joshu's statement, this marks the first dawning of realization that will eventually culminate in full awakening, referred to in Zen as "satori." It is intended to cause a cognitive crisis as the meditator attempts to solve the riddle by means of conceptual thought, but finds all such attempts utterly frustrated. This leads to the development of the "great doubt" (daigi), which is said to burn inside of one like a red-hot ball of iron. When the koan is solved, however, the pain and

**frustration disappear, and are replaced by a serene, non-conceptual awareness.**

## ***WOMEN IN BUDDHISM***

**When Buddha began his teaching career, his first disciples were monks, but eventually some women became Buddhists and began to desire ordination as nuns. The woman who put the request to Buddha was Mahaprajapati Gautami, who had raised him after his mother died. Buddha first refused her request, but after she obtained the support of Ananda, Buddha's personal assistant, he eventually agreed, but added that the decision to admit nuns into the order would shorten the period of "true dharma" by 500 years. It seems clear from the passage, however, that this is not due to any inherent inferiority on the part of women, since Buddha asserts that women are capable of following the spiritual path and attaining the fruits of meditative training. Some commentators speculate that the reason for his refusal may have been that his early followers were homeless wanderers, and so there were no adequate facilities for separating men and women. Because of the pervasiveness and strength of sexual desire, groups of men and women in close proximity inevitably develop attractions and tensions, which lead to conflict. Whatever the reasons for his initial reluctance, Buddha did eventually ordain women, but he added the condition that nuns must observe**

eight additional rules. After the Buddha agreed to create an order of nuns, a number of women took monastic vows, and some were eventually recognized as advanced meditators.

*The Songs of the Nuns* (Therigatha) collection contains a wealth of information on the religious lives of the early Buddhist nuns. Their biographies describe their struggles and tribulations, and many indicate that they saw monastic ordination as a way to escape the drudgery of household work and loveless marriages. One such nun was Patachara, who became an arhati (a female arhat). Her early biography is recounted in the *Songs of the Nuns*, and it graphically illustrates the problems of cyclic existence. Her entire family is killed one by one under tragic circumstances, and she is driven to the brink of madness. In a state of utter despair, she meets the Buddha, who counsels her and allows her to become a nun. After years of meditative practice, she severs all attachments to worldly things, recognizing them as a source of suffering. The following passage was written by an anonymous nun who celebrates her liberation from sorrow, and it praises her teacher, a fellow nun who showed her the path. The following poem was written by the mother of Sumangala (a monk who became an arhat). She was the wife of a poor umbrella

maker who left her home and became a nun. Later she attained the level of arhathood, which she celebrates in these verses.

**Free, I am free!**

**I am completely free from my kitchen pestle!**

**[I am free from] my worthless husband and even his sun umbrella!**

**And my pot that smells like a water snake!**

**I have eliminated all desire and hatred,**

**Going to the base of a tree, [I think,] 'What happiness!'**

**And contemplate this happiness.  
[*Therigatha*, psalm 22]**

**An important Mahayana text (Vimalakirti-nirdesha-sutra, ch. 6) describes the differences between men and women. The dialogue below applies the doctrine of emptiness to the commonly accepted differences between men and women. When these are closely examined, they are found to be merely the results of misguided conceptuality, since there is no inherently existent difference between the sexes.**

**The dialogue occurs in the house of Vimalakirti, a lay bodhisattva who is pretending to be sick in order to initiate a discourse on the dharma. The Buddha's disciples follow Manjushri—an advanced bodhisattva who is said to embody wisdom—to Vimalakirti's house in order to hear the two discuss the perfection of wisdom. The interchange is so profound that a young goddess who lives in Vimalakirti's house rains down flowers on the assembly. The Hinayana monks who are present try frantically to brush them off, because monks are forbidden in the Vinaya to wear flowers or adornments. The bodhisattvas in the audience, however, are unaffected by such rigid adherence to rules, and so the flowers fall from their robes.**

**This causes Shariputra—described in Pali texts as the most advanced of Buddha's Hinayana disciples in the development of wisdom—to marvel at the attainments of the goddess and the bodhisattvas. She chides him for viewing the fruits of meditative training as things to be acquired, and in response Shariputra asks her why she does not change from a woman into a man. The question appears to be based on traditional Indian perceptions of authority, according to which wisdom is associated with elder males. The goddess violates these principles, because she is young and female. But**

**it is clear from the dialogue that she is very advanced in understanding the perfection of wisdom.**

**The goddess responds to Shariputra's challenge by turning him into a woman and herself into a man. This leads to one of the most poignant scenes in the sutra, in which Shariputra experiences discomfort in his new body, apparently because of the Vinaya injunctions preventing monks from physical contact with women. Shariputra, now in a woman's body, is unable to avoid such contact, and tells the goddess that he is a woman without being a woman. The goddess replies that all women are women without being women, because "woman" is merely a conventional designation with no ultimate referent.**

**One of the notable features of the tantric movement is an emphasis on the spiritual capacities of women. Classical Indian literature indicates that extreme misogyny was prevalent in the society, which makes this aspect of tantra even more significant. An example of the emphasis on the equality of women is the fact that one of the basic vows required of all tantric practitioners is a pledge not to denigrate women, "who are the bearers of wisdom." The following passage from the Chandamaharoshana Tantra**



**expresses a similar sentiment in its praises of women.**

**One should honor women.**

**Women are heaven, women are truth,**

**Women are the supreme fire of transformation.**

**Women are Buddha, women are the religious community.**

**Women are the perfection of wisdom.**

**[*Chandamaharoshana-tantra*, p. 33]**

## BUDDHIST SCRIPTURES.

The early Buddhist canon is traditionally referred to as the "Three Baskets" (*tripitaka*; Pali: *tipitaka*), consisting of: (1) *vinaya*: rules of conduct, which are mainly concerned with the regulation of the monastic order; (2) *sutras*: discourses purportedly spoken by the Buddha, and sometimes by his immediate disciples; and (3) *abhidharma*, which includes scholastic treatises that codify and interpret the teachings attributed to the Buddha. According to Buddhist tradition, this division was instituted at the first council. This canon was written in a language called Pali, which is believed to have been derived from a dialect used in the region of Magadha. A second council introduced some modifications to the rules of monastic discipline, and later councils added other texts to the canon.

At first the canon was transmitted orally, but after a time of political and social turmoil King Vattagamani of Sri Lanka ordered that it be committed to writing. This was accomplished between 35 and 32 B.C.E. The *sutras* and *vinaya* were written in Pali, but some of the commentaries were in Sinhala. The Sinhala texts were translated into Pali in the fifth century C.E.

The *Vinaya* section of the Pali canon consists of rules of conduct, most of which are aimed at monks and nuns. Many of these are derived from specific cases in which the Buddha was asked for a ruling on the conduct of particular members of the order, and the general rules he promulgated still serve as the basis for monastic conduct.

The *Sutra* (Pali: *Sutta*) section of the Pali canon is traditionally divided into five "groupings" (*nikaya*): (1) the "long" (*digha*) discourses; (2) the "medium length" (*majjhima*) discourses; (3) the "grouped" (*samyutta*) discourses; (4) the "enumerated" (*anguttara*) discourses, which are arranged according to the enumerations of their topics; and (5) the "minor" (*khuddaka*) discourses, which comprise the largest section of the canon and the one that contains the widest variety of materials. It includes stories of the Buddha's former births (*Jataka*), which report how he gradually perfected the exalted qualities of a buddha; accounts of the lives of the great disciples (*apadana*); didactic verses (*gatha*); an influential work entitled the *Path of Truth* (*Dhammapada*); and a number of other important texts.

The *Abhidharma* (Pali: *abhidhamma*) section includes seven treatises, which organize the doctrines of particular classes of Buddha's

discourses. The *Abhidharma* writers attempted to systematize the profusion of teachings attributed to Buddha into a coherent philosophy. Their texts classify experience in terms of impermanent groupings of factors referred to as *dharma* (Pali: *dhamma*), which in aggregations are the focus of the doctrine (*dharma*) taught by Buddha. They are simple real things, indivisible into something more basic. Collections of *dharms* are the phenomena of experience. Everything in the world—people, animals, plants, inanimate objects—consists of impermanent groupings of *dharms*. Thus nothing possesses an underlying soul or essence. The collections of *dharms* are changing in every moment, and so all of reality is viewed as a vast interconnected network of change and interlinking causes and conditions.

Other early schools developed their own distinctive canons, many of which have very different collections of texts, although the doctrines and practices they contain are similar. Some schools, such as the Sarvastivadins, used Sanskrit for their canons, but today only fragments of these collections exist, mostly in Chinese translations. Although Mahayana schools developed an impressive literature, there does not seem to have been an attempt to create a Mahayana canon in India. The surviving

**Mahayana canons were all compiled in other countries.**

**Canons compiled in Mahayana countries contain much of the material of the Pali canon, but they also include Mahayana sutras and other texts not found in the Pali canon. The Tibetan canon, for example, contains a wealth of Mahayana sutras translated from Sanskrit, treatises (*shastra*) by important Indian Buddhist thinkers, *tantras* and tantric commentaries, and miscellaneous writings that were deemed important enough to include in the canon. The Chinese canon also contains Mahayana sutras, Indian philosophical treatises, and a variety of other texts, but its compilation was much less systematic than that of the Tibetan canon. The Tibetan translators had access to a much wider range of literature, due to the fact that the canon was collected in Tibet many centuries after the Chinese one. In addition, Buddhist literature came to China in a rather haphazard way. The transmission of Buddhist texts to China occurred over the course of several centuries, and during this time the tradition in India was developing and creating new schools and doctrines.**

**The Chinese canon was transmitted to Korea and Japan. Tibet and Mongolia both follow the Tibetan canon, which according to tradition was**

**redacted and codified by Pudön (1290-1364). The Theravada countries of Southeast Asia follow the Pali canon and generally consider the texts of Mahayana to be heterodox.**

**In addition to this canonical literature, each school of Buddhism has created literature that it considers to be authoritative. In the selections below we provide examples of such texts from a wide range of schools and periods of Buddhist literature, but the vast scope of canonical and extra-canonical literature prevents us from including many important works. The selections are intended to present a representative sampling of early texts that contain central doctrines or that recount important events in the history of Buddhism, along with statements by Buddhist thinkers of later times that represent influential developments in Buddhist thought and practice.**

**\* \* \* \***

# SIKHISM

## *LIFE OF NANAK.*

Early one morning in 1499 Nanak (1469-1539) went to a nearby river to perform his ritual ablutions, but he disappeared. When he failed to return, search parties were sent out, but all they found were his clothes on the bank of the river. Assuming that the current had carried Nanak away, they returned to town and reported the news. Several days later, however, Nanak reappeared, and after refusing to speak for three days he told his friends and family that he had been taken to the presence of God and given a mission: to teach Hindus and Muslims that both groups in fact worship the same God. God, he said, was distressed by the sectarian violence perpetrated in His name in India and wanted Nanak to call his followers from rigid adherence to dogmas and the performance of empty rituals to the true essence of religion, which is only known by those who move beyond external observances like ceremonies, prayers, pilgrimages, and study to the rich inner life of true spirituality. This is characterized by selfless devotion (*bhakti*) to God.

**Nanak summarized God's message with the statement, "There is neither Hindu nor Muslim, so whose path should I follow" I will follow God's path, and God is neither Hindu nor Muslim." These words were the cornerstone of his later speeches and writings, in which he stressed the unity of God and the idea that the differences in how religions characterize Him are merely due to human failure to grasp the divine essence. Nanak further contended that there is no reason for religious groups to fight each other, since any system is necessarily limited, and all theological ideas are inadequate.**

**After his meeting with God, Sikh texts refer to Nanak as "Guru," a teacher and devotee of God. Throughout his life he worked to reconcile Hindus and Muslims, to teach them that God is everywhere and continually calls his creatures to experience Him directly and intuitively. This cannot be accomplished by those who rely on external religious observances, and is only found by practitioners of pure devotion who open themselves to the divine call and experience mystical union.**

**Nanak taught that devotion is the highest form of religious practice, but also the most difficult. The ego is a powerful force in human beings, and it causes us to recoil from the experience of union, in which all sense of individuality is swept**



away by a transcendent vision of the divine presence.

Nanak belonged to a widespread but unorganized group of mystics known as Sants, whose members stressed the unity of God and criticized both Hindus and Muslims for being overly concerned with the external aspects of their traditions, while failing to recognize that all theistic religions worship the same ultimate source of all being. The greatest early exponent of this tradition was Kabir, a weaver from Varanasi. He was born into a Muslim family that converted from Hinduism, but his writings indicate that he saw himself as having transcended any sectarian affiliation.

A central theme of Kabir's poems is a rejection of the value of study and prayer as performed by the religious leaders of his day, who are characterized as holding to letter without grasping the true meaning. He accuses both Muslim and Hindu religious leaders of hypocrisy and with failing to grasp the true essence of religion. Hindu *pandits* (religious scholars) are portrayed as being mainly concerned with profit and position, with empty ceremonies and merely external observances. Muslim clerics, he contends, tend to be caught up in systems and words and so do not understand that God is one and that all religious

**traditions have their source in the same ultimate reality. This reality is beyond the reach of human thought, it cannot be grasped by words or doctrines, and is only truly understood by those who abandon external religious observances and devote themselves wholeheartedly to meditation and worship. In the poem below, Kabir stresses the need for true devotion to God, referred to here as Ram (an incarnation of Vishnu). Kabir indicates that asceticism is useless, since one only reaches liberation through ecstatic love of God, in which all sense of self is eliminated and one is consumed by pure love.**

**Go naked if you want, put on animal skins.**

**What does it matter till you see the inward  
Ram?**

**If the union yogis seek came from roaming  
about in the buff, every deer in the forest  
would be saved.**

**If shaving your head spelled spiritual  
success, heaven would be filled with sheep.**

**And brother, if holding back your seed  
earned you a place in paradise, eunuchs  
would be the first to arrive.**

**Kabir says: Listen brother, without the name of Ram who has ever won the spirit's prize?**

**[*Kabir Granthavali, pad 174*]**

**The poetry of Nanak stresses similar themes. He denounces idol worship and indicates that such practices as pilgrimages, ritual bathing, and ceremonies tend to keep the individual far from God. Nanak, like Kabir, views God as having two aspects: God is both immanent (*saguna*, literally, "having qualities") and transcendent (*nirguna*, "without qualities"). In essence God is completely transcendent, and any qualities imputed to God are merely human attempts to grasp the ultimate reality in terms that we are able to understand. God in essence is completely other, unknowable, and ineffable, but may still be experienced by those who empty themselves of ego and open themselves to the divine presence.**

**Nanak died in 1539 after founding and guiding a small group of followers he referred to as "Sikhs," or students. His students were both Hindus and Muslims, who saw Nanak as a great religious leader whose mystical experiences transcended their sectarian divisions. According to Sikh legends, he continually worked to help**

**them to overcome their limitations of religious vision.**

**Nanak's final teaching was given on his deathbed. When it became clear that death was near, a dispute arose between Hindu and Muslim Sikhs. The former group wanted to cremate him in accordance with their traditions, while the latter argued for burying his body. Nanak settled the dispute by telling them that each group should place a garland of flowers on one side of his body, and that the group whose garland remained unwilted after three days would be able to dispose of his corpse in accordance with its traditions. The next morning the shroud was removed, but his body was gone. All that remained were two garlands of unwilted flowers. Thus even in death Nanak taught his followers the importance of overcoming sectarian differences.**

## ***GURUS.***

**Before Nanak died, he designated his disciple Guru Angad (1539-1552) as his successor. According to Sikh tradition, this event marks the inauguration of the Sikh path (*panth*). Throughout Sikh literature the importance of the Guru is emphasized. In the early years of the tradition the Guru was human, and Sikhs believed that Nanak and his successors were mouthpieces through whom God revealed his message to humanity. Following the tenure of the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, the Adi Granth was designated as the Guru, since it contained the inspired messages of the ten human Gurus and their Sant predecessors. The Gurus are believed to provide essential guidance, since their words are the signposts provided by God to call His devotees to mystical realization of truth.**

**If the True Guru is gracious, trust becomes complete.**

**If the True Guru is gracious, no one ever yearns.**

**If the True Guru is gracious, trouble is a thing unknown.**

**If the True Guru is gracious, God's pleasure is acclaimed.**

**If the True Guru is gracious, how could there be fear of death?**

**If the True Guru is gracious, lasting happiness is granted.**

**If the True Guru is gracious, one finds life's greatest treasures.**

**If the True Guru is gracious, one mingles with the Truth.**

**[*Var majh Pauri*, 25]**

**The office of Guru was in turn passed on to Amar Das (1552-1574), and then to Guru Ram Das (1574-1581). The fifth Guru, Arjan (1581-1606), worked to mold the Sikhs into a cohesive religious, social, and economic community. He initiated construction of the Golden Temple at Amritsar, which is today the holiest shrine of the Sikhs, and he directed the compilation of the *Adi Granth*, the holiest scripture of the tradition. This text contains writings by Nanak and the other early Gurus, as well as works by Kabir and other devotional poets. Guru Arjan placed the *Mul Mantra*, the basic Sikh statement of faith, at the beginning of the holiest book of the Sikhs, the *Adi Granth*. It expresses the primary**

**attributes of the Sikh conception of God, His absolute unity and absolute transcendence.**

**There is one God, Eternal Truth is His Name.**

**Maker of all things, fearing nothing and at enmity with nothing, timeless is His image.**

**Not begotten, being of His own Being: by the grace of the Guru, made known to humanity. [*Adi Granth* 1.1]**

**Today the *Adi Granth* is the center of the religious life of the community. Ornate copies of the text are placed on special pedestals in the center of each Sikh temple (*gurdvar*, literally, "door to the Guru"), and portions of it are chanted almost constantly while the temple is open.**

**Arjan's tenure marks a change of direction for the Sikh community. During the reigns of the first four Gurus the Panth had enjoyed generally amicable relations with the Muslim Mughal rulers who controlled northern India, but with the ascension of the emperor Jehangir the situation changed. Harkening back to the militancy of the early Muslim conquerors, Jehangir actively persecuted other religious groups, including the Sikhs. He had Arjan captured, and tortured him with the intention of**

**forcing the Guru to renounce his faith. Arjan refused to submit to the emperor's demands, and he eventually died in prison. Shortly before his death, he advised his son Hargobind (1661-1664) to "sit fully armed upon the throne," since Arjan recognized the threat the new Mughal ruler posed for his community.**

**The sixth Guru, Hari Rai (1644-1661) ruled during a time of increasing tensions between the Sikhs and the Mughal emperor. The eighth, Hari Krishan (1661-1664), died as a child, and was succeeded by Tegh Bahadur (1664-1675), who became another Sikh martyr as a result of his opposition to the emperor's imposition of a tax on all non-Muslims in his empire. Intending to make an example of the Guru, the emperor had imprisoned and tortured. He was ordered to renounce his faith and his opposition to the tax. When he refused, Tegh Bahadur was executed.**

**Guru Hargobind followed the wishes of his father, Guru Arjan, and began wearing two swords at all times, one symbolizing his religious authority, and the other his temporal authority. His tenure marks the beginning of the transition of the Panth from a group of devotional mystics concerned with reconciling the differences between Hindus and Muslims into a tradition stressing the importance of combat readiness**



**and willingness to fight—and die if necessary—in order to defend the faith.**

**His son Gobind Singh (1675-1708) became the tenth and last Guru. Realizing that the position made its holder a target, as the Guru lay dying from wounds inflicted by a Muslim assassin he declared that henceforth the *Adi Granth* would be the Guru. He told the community to view the text as the condensation of the inspired words of the Gurus, the mouthpieces of God, which should guide them in their religious lives.**

**Gobind Singh's other major contribution to the development of Sikhism was his institution of the Khalsa, the community of Sikh believers. Besieged by Muslim rulers who wanted to eliminate the Sikhs, the Guru realized that in order to survive his followers would have to develop into a military force. In a move that permanently changed the character of the Sikh community, he gathered the faithful together and asked if any were willing to die for their faith. Five men stepped forward, and the Guru led them one by one to a tent, and then emerged with his sword dripping blood. Many of the people in attendance believed that the Guru had gone mad, but Gobind Singh later showed them that the five men were actually unharmed. He had killed five goats, and the blood they had witnessed had been that of the animals. They**

would consider themselves to be members of the Khalsa, and membership would henceforth be exclusive. The following day the Guru completed the process of transforming the community into a warrior group by declaring that henceforth the Sikhs would adopt external signs differentiating them from other communities. The signs were five distinctive marks symbolic of their new commitment, which are referred to as the "Five Ks" because their names in the Punjabi language all begin with the letter K. These are: (1) *kesh*, hair, which refers to the Sikh practice of not cutting the hair; (2) *kangha*, a comb used to keep the hair neat; (3) *kirpan*, a short sword, symbolizing the warrior ethos of the Khalsa; (4) *kara*, a steel wristband; and (5) *kachch*, short pants. Many male members of the community also began wearing turbans as a way of managing their hair, and most males also changed their family name to Singh, meaning lion, as a symbol of their devotion to the Guru. Women changed their names to Kaur, meaning princess, and all Sikhs were declared by the Guru to be members of the warrior caste (*kshatriya*), symbolizing both their emphasis on combat readiness and the equality of all believers.

Nanak had established the Panth as a community dedicated to reconciling Hindus and

**Muslims, but Gobind Singh realized that peaceful relations with the Mughal emperor were no longer possible. In order to maintain its survival, the community would have to defend itself against attacks, and it would have to develop into a cohesive and well-trained military force in order to protect itself from its neighbors. The Mughal emperor was determined to eradicate the Sikhs, whom he considered to be a political and economic threat. Moreover, he viewed Sikhism as a particularly pernicious heresy, since its theology contained elements that were concordant with Islam, which he believed to be the sole truth. He feared that the Islamic elements of Sikhism might tempt people of weak intellect away from Islam, and in order to prevent this he resolved to eradicate the Sikh community. It is ironic that Sikhism began as a movement dedicated to reconciling different faiths but was pushed by historical circumstances to become a tradition that stressed the differences of its members from other religious groups and that was determined to defend itself from hostile opponents.**

## ***SIKH DOCTRINES AND PRACTICES***

**Sikh theology contends that God is one without a second, the transcendent ultimate that cannot be grasped by human intelligence or described by language. God is commonly referred to by such negative terms as Timeless (*akal*) and Unproduced (*ajuni*), but is also described positively as Truth or Being (*sat*). God is both utterly transcendent and accessible to His creatures through grace. God chooses some beings to draw near to Him through devotion, and he speaks to all beings through the words of the Gurus.**

**Sikhs commonly refer to God as *Akal Purakh*, "Timeless Being." He creates and sustains the universe, and is only known by those who approach Him with devotion. God reveals Himself through the Divine Name (*nam*), which expresses aspects of the divine Reality as understood by the limited intellects of His creatures. All of creation reflects the glory and activity of God, and so in this sense everything is an expression of the Name. People are able to approach God through meditation on the Name, through which they may transcend ordinary understanding and approach the Divine Presence. The Name is said in Sikh texts to be "the total expression of all that God is," and those who open themselves to the Name through**

selfless devotion may come to know God in a way that transcends ordinary knowing.

One of the most important of Sikh meditative practices is "remembering the Name" (*nam simaran*), in which the devotee contemplates various epithets of God, along with the adumbrations of the divine essence that are found throughout creation. In this practice, the meditator generally repeats a particular word or *mantra*, or chants the songs of the Gurus, in order to bring about intuitive understanding of God.

Like Islam, Sikhism teaches that there is only one God, although He is known in various guises by different religions. In essence, however, God transcends all creeds and systems. Sikhism also agrees with Islam in rejecting the idea that God takes physical incarnations (*avatara*). God is utterly transcendent and cannot be contained within the limited form of a created being. Like Hinduism, however, Sikhism contends that living creatures are reborn in a beginningless cycle (*samsara*) and that each being's situation is a result of past actions (*karma*). The ultimate goal of Sikhism is liberation (*moksha*) from cyclic existence, but this can only be attained through God's grace, and not by personal effort.

**The primary factor preventing the attainment of liberation is self-reliance (*haumai*), which causes beings falsely to imagine that they are independent and autonomous, that their fates are within their own control, and that salvation may be attained through actions. Self-reliance is born of ignorance, which is the root cause of continued transmigration. It is a perceptual error in which one mistakenly believes that one is independent and autonomous, although the fact of the matter is that everything in the universe is created and sustained by God. Those who hold to mistaken views of separateness and individuality fail to recognize the omnipresence of God and their utter dependence upon his grace. In order to combat self-reliance, one must cultivate proper attitude (*hukam*), which involves recognizing one's utter dependence upon God. Humble and devoted repetition of the Name helps one to develop humility and to recognize the transcendent glory of God.**

**God is within everyone, and so rituals are unnecessary, according to Sikhism, nor is there any point in making pilgrimages, since God is everywhere. One may worship God anywhere and at any time, and Sikhism urges its followers to strive toward realization of the Divine Presence all around them. Sikhism contends that ignorance (*avidya*) is the primary factor**

preventing one from knowing God, and that ignorance is only eliminated by those who humbly submit themselves to the divine will and listen to God's message as revealed by the words of the Gurus and other inspired devotional mystics.

Since God is the ultimate source of everything, all is really God, although ignorant beings fail to realize this fact. God's presence is hidden from us by the power of illusion (*maya*), a process of projection that causes beings mistakenly to imagine that they have an existence apart from Him. In reality, however, everything is a part of Him, and nothing can exist apart from Him. When one wakes up to the reality behind this illusion (which can only occur through God's grace), one realizes the unity of God and gradually comes to perceive God in everything. Sikhism's formulation of the doctrine of *maya* differs from that of Advaita Vedanta in that in Sikh philosophy *maya* is not an objective reality projected by God, but a subjective error resulting from a wrong point of view, a belief in duality rather than unity. This causes a mirage of the world to be seen as an end in itself. It is eliminated by devotion and meditation on the divine Name. One who is wholeheartedly immersed in this practice may through the grace of God escape the cycle of birth and death and

**attain final liberation, which Sikhism contends is an eternally blissful state of union with the Ultimate.**



## ***SIKH SCRIPTURES.***

The first attempt to create a collection of authoritative Sikh texts was made during the tenure of the third Guru, Amar Das (1552-1574), who supervised a compilation of works by his predecessors. The fifth Guru, Arjan, began the collection of texts that became the *Adi Granth*, the most revered scripture of the tradition. Sikhs consider it to be the Guru, since it contains the collected wisdom of the early Gurus and their Sant predecessors.

There are three known recensions of the *Adi Granth*: (1) one believed to be the original text written by Bhai Gurdas and owned by a Sikh family in Kartarpur; (2) the "Damdama Recension," which was compiled during the seventeenth century and which includes works by Guru Tegh Bahadur; and (3) the "Banno Recension," which is widely regarded by Sikhs as non-canonical. The Damdama Recension is the standard text for all copies of the *Adi Granth* published in modern times. Modern published texts of the *Adi Granth* follow this version, even to the extent of adopting its pagination. Thus, all copies of the *Adi Granth* have 1,430 pages, and every individual page mirrors the contents of the original Damdama text.

The *Adi Granth* is divided into three main portions: (1) Introductory Material (pp. 1-13); (2) *Ragas* (pp. 14-1353); and (3) Miscellaneous Works (pp. 1353-1430). The introductory section begins with the *Mul Mantra*, the basic statement of Sikh faith. The next portions are the works of the *Japji* of Guru Nanak, which is regarded as containing his quintessential teachings. The introductory material ends with works by Guru Angad, Nanak's immediate successor. The second portion of the introductory section is referred to as the *Sodar*, so named because the first word of the first hymn is *sodar*. This section contains four poems by Guru Nanak, three by Guru Ram Das, and two by Guru Arjan. The third section of the introduction is named *Sohila* or *Kirtan Sohila*. It contains three works by Guru Nanak, one by Guru Ram Das, and one by Guru Arjan.

The term *Raga* refers to various metres used in the works of the second section of the *Adi Granth*. This is the largest portion of the text, and is divided into thirty-one sections, each of which contains hymns of a particular type. Within each *Raga*, works are arranged according to length and content. Hymns in four stanzas are placed at the beginning, followed by hymns in eight stanzas. The last part of the *Ragas* contains poems by predecessors of

Sikhism whose religious visions are considered to be consonant with that of Guru Nanak and his successors. Works by Kabir and the devotional poets Namdev and Ravidas are found in this section.

The section containing Miscellaneous Works has more writings by Kabir, and some compositions by the Sufi teacher Sheikh Farid. The final portion of the *Adi Granth* consists of fifty-seven verses by Guru Tegh Bahadur, two works by Guru Arjan, and the *Rag-mala*, which summarizes the contents of the *Ragas*.

The language of the *Adi Granth* is referred to as "*Sant Bhasa*," the language of the Saints. Linguistically similar to modern Punjabi, it was the language adopted by the devotional Sant poets of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in northern India. The words of the *Adi Granth* are recorded in the Gurmukhi script, which is also used for modern Punjabi.

Another important scriptural source for Sikhism is the *Dasam Granth*, the compilation of which is associated with the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh. Like the *Adi Granth*, it is referred to as "Guru," and is widely regarded as an authoritative text, but it is far less important for the tradition than the *Adi Granth*. It contains a range of literature, including extensive portions

of stories from Hindu literature, many of which are written in different dialects.

The compositions of the mystic poets Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal are also highly regarded by Sikhs and have the status of scriptures. The former writer lived during the tenure of the third through sixth Gurus, and the latter was a follower of Guru Gobind Singh. Along with the *Adi Granth* and the *Dasam Granth*, their writings are the only works approved for recitation in Sikh temples.

Mention should also be made of the *janam-sakhis*, which are hagiographical stories of Guru Nanak's life, which stress the themes of the unity of God, the pointlessness of sectarianism, and the worthlessness of external religious observances. They were probably composed during the sixteenth century, and although they have not been granted the status of scriptures these stories are widely popular.

\* \* \* \*

## CONFUCIANISM

Of all the traditions discussed in this book, Confucianism probably has the least in common with what most contemporary Westerners associate with "religion." Confucius (ca. 551-479 B.C.E.), the founder of Confucianism, did not assert the existence of a creator God, although he did mention an impersonal force called "Heaven" (*t'ien*) that watches over human affairs and confers a mandate on rulers that legitimates their power. Confucianism has no churches and no ecclesiastical hierarchy, and Confucius never clearly articulated any vision of the afterlife or a path to salvation. The focus of Confucius was squarely on human beings and their social relations with others. Confucius' philosophy articulated his vision of the Way (*tao*) of the "superior person" (*chün-tzu*), who embodies the qualities of a truly good human being. When asked about "religious" topics such as the nature of Heaven, the existence and propitiation of spirits, and so forth, Confucius generally cautioned his audiences to focus on the present life and on their personal conduct, and not to waste time on idle speculation.

## ***THE NATURE OF CONTEMPORARY CHINESE RELIGION.***

**For modern Chinese, religion is primarily a matter of participation in community activities and rituals connected with important transitions, rather than adherence to doctrines and codes of conduct. Chinese rituals mark and celebrate the important rites of passage of human existence: birth, marriage, and death, as well as events in the agricultural calendar, such as planting and harvest. These rituals developed in a culture that is overwhelmingly agrarian and rural, in which the majority of people were (and still are) engaged in agricultural work. Underlying many Chinese religious practices is a deeply felt sense of the importance of promoting community solidarity and an emphasis on the rootedness of the individual and the collective in the natural world.**

**Another important feature of Chinese religious traditions is their eclecticism. The indigenous Chinese religious systems borrowed elements from each other and from traditions like Buddhism that were imported to China, and the foreign systems in turn adopted Chinese motifs and ideas in order to accommodate themselves to Chinese sensibilities. Among contemporary Chinese, sharp distinctions are seldom drawn between the major religious traditions of China:**

**Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism; rather, they are viewed as harmoniously intersecting with each other to form a comprehensive system that is able to adapt itself to a wide spectrum of religious needs. The three traditions are collectively referred to as "lineage of teachings" (*tsung chiao*) or "the three teachings" (*san chiao*), indicating that they are not perceived as separate systems of doctrine and practice but as mutually complementary emphases.**

**Confucianism is viewed as being primarily concerned with the interactions of people in a social context. It outlines the norms and values that ensure social harmony, along with the rituals and duties that enable people to act appropriately when in the company of others. Taoism focuses on the connections between human beings and their natural environment, how natural processes and forces affect human existence, and how to predict the movements of these forces and manipulate them for the benefit of individuals and society. The purview of Buddhism is mainly life after death, since Buddhism brought to China a highly developed eschatology and a pantheon of compassionate buddhas and bodhisattvas who are willing and able to give aid both in the present life and after death.**

## ***LIFE OF CONFUCIUS.***

**Confucius is the latinized form of K'ung fu-tzu, or "Master K'ung." According to Chinese tradition, he lived during the fifth century B.C.E. He was born in the small state of Lu, in modern day Shantung Province. Some accounts claim that he was a descendant of the royal house of the Shang Dynasty (1751-1122 B.C.E., the earliest authenticated dynasty of China), but his family had become impoverished by Confucius' time. His father is said to have been a soldier, and his mother was not the first wife. According to later tradition, when Confucius was born dragons appeared in his house and a unicorn was sighted in his village.**

**His father died when Confucius was young, and his mother died while he was still a child. According to Ssu-ma ch'ien, when Confucius was a boy he had little interest in the games of other children, and instead preferred to arrange sacrificial implements and pretend to be performing rituals. Apparently Confucius did not have a formal education, but through independent study managed to become renowned for his learning.**

**In his twenties he began to attract students. He married young and held a minor government position that required him to keep records of**



stores of grains and animals used for official sacrifices. According to some accounts, his interest in rituals led him to visit Lao-tzu to seek advice on the performance of sacrifices, but Confucius was admonished for being excessively concerned with external observances and thus neglecting the Tao.

Confucius was married around the age of nineteen to a woman from P'in-kuan in the state of Sung. They had a son and a daughter. Fearing the onset of social disruption in Lu, he traveled to the state of Ch'i, hoping to gain a position of influence. He was well received but failed to achieve his primary objective, and so returned to Lu at the age of fifty-one. There he was appointed minister of justice, and according to Confucian accounts he instituted a period of good government. Records of his tenure claim that articles left on the road were returned to their owners, and people could travel freely without fear of crime. He became an advisor to the duke of Lu, but reportedly resigned in disgust after the duke received a present of eighty dancing girls from the rival duke of Ch'i, after which he no longer attended to his duties in the morning.

Confucius lived during a time of social and political turmoil, and this had a powerful effect on his thinking. The Chou dynasty (1111-249

**B.C.E.), which had unified China and fostered the development of Chinese culture, was losing control, and China was in the process of breaking up into fiefdoms that were vying with each other for territory and power. Confucius lamented this social disintegration and hoped to guide his country back to the norms and practices of the early days of the Chou dynasty as reported in *The Book of Poetry* and the *Book of History*, both of which extolled the superior qualities of sage-emperors of the Shang and Chou dynasties. Confucius hoped to find a position of political power that would allow him to help the rulers of his time to rediscover the traditions of the past, which he believed would help China to correct its problems and reestablish good government.**

**Unable to find a suitable position in Lu, at the age of fifty-three Confucius began a trek through China in search of a ruler who would allow him to put his ideas into practice. During the course of thirteen years he journeyed to nine states. Some received him warmly and asked his advice, but in one state he was surrounded and threatened, and was made a target of assassination in another, and detained by government authorities in a third state.**

**He promised that any state that allowed him significant control of domestic matters and**

foreign affairs would soon enjoy prosperity, enhanced prestige, and that it would have a contented populace that fully supported the policies of the rulers, but his ideas of government by wise and humane rulers were considered dangerous at a time when most rulers controlled their domains by force. After realizing that no one would give him an opportunity to implement his ideas, he returned to Lu at the age of sixty-eight and devoted himself to teaching, convinced that his life's mission had been a failure.

## *Rise Of Confucianism.*

In spite of Confucius's sense of his own failure, his fame as a teacher grew, and traditional sources report that young men came from far and wide to study with Confucius and that he never turned away a student who was unable to pay him. As a result, young men of humble origins had access to education, which was an important factor in finding employment in government.

Confucius taught his students to cultivate themselves and urged them to aspire to become "superior persons." The superior person, according to Confucius, possesses an unwavering moral compass, and thus knows what is correct in all situations. He has the virtue of "human-heartedness" (*jen*), the coalescence of the moral qualities that characterize those who are truly good. A superior person is honest, courageous, stands in awe of Heaven and constantly seeks to perfect himself, is learned but does not boast of his learning, does not set his mind "for" or "against" anything, holds to no particular political philosophy, but rather seeks to follow what is right in every situation. He has no needs of his own, and so is able to work selflessly for others. His unassuming manifestation of good qualities inspires others to become better.

**Society, according to Confucius, is perfected by such people, who set a moral standard that subtly motivates others to correct themselves in order to emulate them.**

**Although Confucius was unable to acquire the political power he desired during his lifetime, his students passed on his teachings, becoming teachers themselves. Some of them became influential educators and helped to install his notion of the superior person as a standard for conduct among the educated elite of China. In addition, Confucius introduced to China the idea that the primary criteria for holding public office should be intelligence, learning, and highly developed moral character, rather than hereditary status. He believed that universal standards of ethical behavior are outlined in the classics, and so he urged his students to study these texts in order to develop their moral awareness.**

## CONFUCIAN SCRIPTURES

According to Confucian tradition, Confucius edited the texts that came to be regarded as the Confucian classics: the *Book of Poetry* (*Shih ching*), the *Book of Changes* (*I ching*), the *Book of History* (*Shu ching*), the *Book of Rites* (*Li chi*), and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Ch'un-ch'iu*). These are regarded as the primary canonical texts of the tradition, along with the "Four Books": the *Analects* (*Lun-yü*), the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Chung-yung*), the *Great Learning* (*Ta hsüeh*), and the *Mencius* (*Meng-tzu*).

The *Book of Poetry* is the earliest anthology of Chinese poetry. It contains 305 poems dating from early times until the later part of the Chou dynasty. Confucian tradition holds that Confucius selected these from an earlier collection of three thousand poems, choosing those written in the finest style and exhibiting a high level of moral consciousness. The poems in the collection are mostly written in a style using rhymed quatrains with four characters per line, which became the standard for Chinese poetic writing after the time of Confucius.

The *Book of Changes* discusses how natural systems change, and it has long been regarded as a manual for divination. It contains sixty-four

hexagrams, along with explanations of the significance of each one and "ten wings" of commentary that indicate how they should be interpreted. According to Confucian tradition, the ten wings were composed by Confucius, but this attribution has been rejected by most contemporary scholars (although it is admitted that he may have had a hand in composing one of the wings).

The hexagrams are composed of two trigrams each, and the trigrams are composed of broken and unbroken lines. The lines signify interactions of *yin* and *yang*, the two opposing polarities whose movements govern the developments of natural systems. *Yin* is said to be passive, wet, yielding, and feminine, and is represented by broken lines, while *yang* is aggressive, dry, forceful, and masculine, and is represented by unbroken lines. The pattern of the lines of a hexagram is believed to provide indications of the directions of natural elements and forces.

The *Book of History* is a collection of historical records and speeches purportedly from the early dynasties of China. It is the earliest Chinese historical work, containing documents from seventeen centuries, dating back to the time of the legendary sage kings (third millennium B.C.E.). According to tradition, it

was compiled and edited by Confucius, who chose selections for their historical and moral import. Each selection reports an event in Chinese history and contains a colophon that indicates the moral judgments of the author.

The *Book of Rites* describes the implements used in state rituals, the rules of the royal court, ethical exhortations for women and children, discussions of education, proper performance of funerals and sacrifices to ancestors, and how a scholar should behave.

The *Spring and Autumn Annals* are historical records from the state of Lu from the period between 722 to 481 B.C.E. It describes the behavior of rulers, and is composed in a way that indicates the moral judgment of the compiler, believed by tradition to be Confucius.

Confucian tradition also holds that Confucius edited the *Book of Music* (*Yüeh ching*), which is now lost. It was replaced in the twelfth century by a ritual text entitled *Rites of Chou* (*Chou li*). During the Han period, these six texts came to be referred to as the "six disciplines" (*liu shu*), and later as the "six classics" (*liu ching*). Modern scholarship questions whether or not Confucius actually had a hand in editing these texts, since no evidence exists for this, except for relatively late traditions. It is clear from



accounts of his life that he was thoroughly familiar with these texts and that he taught them to his students, but contemporary scholars see little reason to accept the tradition that he edited them.

The *Analects* contains 492 chapters collected into twenty books, and it contains pithy instructions on the core concepts of Confucius' philosophy. The primary focus is the training and character of the superior person, who is morally upright, learned, and restrained in his appetites.

The *Doctrine of the Mean* was originally chapter forty-two of the *Book of Rites*. According to Confucian tradition it was authored by Tseng Ts'an (ca. 505-436 B.C.E.), but Chu Hsi contended that the opening paragraph was written by Confucius and that the rest of the work was an explanation composed by Tseng Ts'an. It outlines three goals for the superior person: "making luminous virtue shine" (*ming ming-te*), "having sympathy for the people" (*ch'in-min*) and "abiding in attainment of perfect goodness" (*chih yü chih-shan*). These are said to be the first steps toward ordering society and establishing good government.

The *Great Learning* was originally chapter thirty-one of the *Book of Rites*, but came to be

regarded as a separate text by the Confucian tradition. Tzu-ssu, a grandson of Confucius, is traditionally held to be its author, but this attribution is rejected by most contemporary scholars. It discusses the Tao of Heaven, which is said to be a principle that transcends the world but is manifest in its workings.

The *Mencius* contains teachings of the Confucian scholar Meng-tzu. These were written down by his students. The writings of Mencius represented an influential commentary on the thought of Confucius concerning the conduct of the sage and the nature of good government. The text consists of seven chapters, divided into two parts each.

Ch'in Shih Huang Ti, the founder of the Ch'in dynasty (221-206 B.C.E.), ordered Confucian texts burned, and as a result some works were lost, but most of the important texts survived, hidden by scholars until the political climate changed. The emperor also ordered the execution of a number of Confucian scholars, since he viewed the Confucian ideals of benevolent government as being at odds with his own authoritarian style.

When the Ch'in was overthrown by the Han dynasty, Confucianism again became the state ideology, largely due to the efforts of the

**Confucian scholar Tung Chung -shu, who was an advisor to emperor Wu-ti (r. 140-87 B.C.E.). In 125 he created a university whose educational program was based on the study of the Five Classics (the *Book of Music* had been lost during the persecution of Confucianism) and the Four Books.**

**In the twelfth century, Chu Hsi published an edition of the Four Books that became the primary text for Confucian studies, eclipsing the Five Classics. In his system, students were advised to read the *Great Learning* first in order to learn the basic patterns of Confucianism, and then to move on to the *Analects*, which developed the ideas contained in the *Great Learning*. After that they should study the *Mencius* for its ability to inspire thought, and finally they should study the *Doctrine of the Mean*, which he described as profound and subtle. Due to his influence, these texts formed the basis for topics of the imperial examination system until it was abolished in 1905.**

## ***CONFUCIUS'S TEACHINGS FROM THE ANALECTS***

**The Analects (Lun-yü), record instructions given by Confucius to his students and events in his life. The title of the text literally means "conversations," and it received this name because it mainly contains conversations between Confucius and his students. They emphasize an interrelated set of themes, including the character and training of the "superior person," the idea that rulers should govern by moral persuasion and should treat their subjects as a loving father treats his children, the importance of following tradition, the role of rituals and sacrifices in establishing a harmonious state, and the importance of providing for the basic needs of the populace.**

**Confucius believed that the righteousness of leaders is the key to social stability and told rulers that it is important scrupulously to practice the social rituals that help a society to function harmoniously. The superior person, he taught, has a strong sense of propriety (li), a general term for the day to day norms of social interaction as well as for state ceremonies. The Book of History purports to record events from early Chinese history. It was an important source for Confucius in his understanding of the exalted qualities of the sage emperors Yao and**

**Shun, who are described as exemplars of righteousness, wisdom, and benevolent government.**

**Examining into antiquity, we find that the Emperor Yao was called Fang-hsün. He was reverent, intelligent, accomplished, sincere, and mild. He was sincerely respectful and capable of modesty. His light covered the four extremities of the empire and extended to Heaven above and the earth below. He was able to make bright his great virtue, and bring affection to the nine branches of the family. When the nine branches of the family had become harmonious, he distinguished and honored the hundred clans. When the hundred clans had become illustrious, he harmonized the myriad states. The numerous people were amply nourished and prosperous and became harmonious.[*Shu-ching* selections]**

**In addition, the superior person speaks the truth as he understands it, and so is concerned with the "rectification of names" (cheng-ming), which involves calling things what they are and using terms in a non-deceptive manner. Rulers**

**who equivocate and who use euphemisms that attempt to cloak the truth of things lose the confidence of the people as surely as those who are morally degenerate and who blunder in their decisions.**

**According to his student Tseng-tzu, there is "one thread" running through all of Confucius' teachings: an emphasis on the centrality of morality and cultivation of an ethical foundation, which leads the superior person to treat others like himself (shu). Human beings are said to have a basically moral nature (chung), which needs to be developed by education and contact with superior persons. Such people cultivate their own moral consciousness and seek to establish others in virtue.**

**Confucius taught that a person with the virtue of human-heartedness (jen) knows how to treat others and acts appropriately in all situations. A central virtue of such a person is filial piety (hsiao), which is evidenced by respect for elders and persons in authority, as well as by proper performance of rituals for the ancestors. Such behavior accords with the dictates of Heaven.**

**Confucius believed that Heaven watches over human affairs and confers a mandate to rule (t'ien-ming). This concept was first developed by the founders of the Chou dynasty to justify their**

conquest of the Shang rulers. According to this theory, the emperor is the "son of Heaven" (t'ien-tzu), appointed to oversee human affairs, but rulers who become lazy, corrupt, or despotic cause Heaven to withdraw the mandate, and so lose their legitimacy. Heaven first sends warnings in the form of natural disasters, internal turmoil, or personal crises, and those who reform themselves may again earn Heaven's favor. Those who persist in their immoral actions, however, are eventually deposed by Heaven, which appoints other rulers of better moral character.

Although Confucius himself seldom mentioned such topics as spiritual beings, the nature of Heaven, life after death, or spirituality in general, his teachings became the basis for the most influential tradition of philosophy in China, one that eventually developed religious characteristics. Later Confucians propounded elaborate cosmological theories, doctrines concerning death and afterlife, and cultic practices. The tradition spread into other parts of Asia, and has been an important influence in Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Although officially proscribed by the current leadership of the People's Republic of China, the ideas and values of Confucianism continue to exert a powerful influence on the Chinese people today.

## *MENCIUS*

Mencius was the most influential early disciple of Confucius and his teachings are preserved in a book simply titled *The Mencius*. The name "Mencius" is a Latinized version of his actual Chinese name, Meng-tzu. According to Ssu-ma ch'ien's account of Mencius' life, he was born in the small state of Tsou and followed the example of Confucius in seeking public office in order to put his ideas into practice. Like his predecessor, however, he was unable to realize his ambitions, and made his greatest impact as a teacher.

Mencius (Meng-tzu) was born in Tsou and was taught by a student of Master Ssu. After mastering the Tao, we traveled abroad and served King Hsüan of Ch'i (r. 342-324 B.C.E.). King Hsüan was unable to use him, so he went to Liang. King Hui of Liang did not find his counsel helpful. He was considered impractical and removed from the reality of affairs.... Wherever he went, he did not fit in. He retired, and together with students such as Wan Chang he discussed the Songs and Documents and elucidated the ideas of Confucius, composing [his text entitled] *Mencius* in seven sections. [*Shih-chi* selections]



**Mencius believed that the first rule of "humane government" (jen-cheng) is to provide for the basic needs of the people, and he agreed with Confucius that rulers should rectify their own behavior and cultivate a moral awareness. He taught his students that human nature (hsing) is basically good, but that people become corrupted through exposure to negative influences. No matter how depraved a particular person might become, however, the basic nature remains good, and through proper education one's fundamental goodness may be reawakened.**

**In one passage he compares human nature to the shoots of plants growing on a hill called Ox Mountain, on which cattle graze. Plants constantly send up shoots, but the cattle eat them, and so the plants are not able to grow. If the cattle leave, however, the plants will be able to grow, just as human nature will find its innate goodness if the conditions inhibiting its growth are removed. In order for this to happen, people must train their minds (hsin), which provide guidance in the process of moral development. The mind provides a faculty of discernment that, when attuned to human nature, develops into an unwavering sense of right and wrong.**

**Like Confucius, Mencius believed that Heaven confers a mandate on rulers and that it acts to remove corrupt rulers, but Mencius also contended that the people may become instruments of Heaven's will. When rulers become cruel and oppressive, they lose all legitimacy, and thus it becomes permissible for their subjects to remove them from office. Such doctrines were viewed by the rulers of his day as dangerous, and not surprisingly he was unable to find anyone to give him a position of real power. The selections below are drawn from his collected teachings, entitled the Mencius.**

***HSÜN-TZU AND YANG HSIUNG:  
THE NATURE OF HUMAN BEINGS.***

**The question of whether human nature is basically good or evil was an important one for the Confucian tradition after Confucius. Mencius declared that human nature is basically good. Confucius himself did not make a definitive statement on the matter, and only said that people are born alike but become different through training and practice. He did contend, however, that all men have the potential to become superior persons. The most influential interpreter of Confucius prior to the Han dynasty was Hsün-tzu (Hsün Ch'ing, d. 215 B.C.E.), a younger contemporary of Mencius who lived in the state of Chao and who is best known today for his treatises on government and warfare. Unlike Mencius, Hsün-tzu believed that human nature is basically evil:**

**Human nature is evil; any good in humans is acquired by conscious exertion. Now, the nature of man is such that he is born with a love of profit. Following this nature will cause its aggressiveness and greedy tendencies to grow and courtesy and deference to disappear. Humans are born with feelings of envy and hatred....**

**He maintained further that rulers must employ strict controls in order to keep their subjects in line. He advocated strong centralized rule and the use of punishment to restrain the population, but he also believed that human beings can be taught to be good through discipline and education. He was reportedly a teacher of Han Fei, the exponent of the philosophy of Legalism that became the dominant ideology of the Ch'in dynasty.**

**Hsün-tzu rejected Mencius' ideas about human nature, contending that humans have innate desires, which can never be fully satisfied. People naturally desire to possess things, and envy others who have things that they do not, and these basic tendencies oppose the cultivation of virtue. Goodness is only attained through training that teaches people to restrain their urges and recognize higher goods. This training requires an education in the classics and education in proper performance of rites.**

**... when each person follows his inborn nature and indulges his natural inclinations, aggressiveness and greed are certain to develop.... Thus it is necessary that man's nature undergo the transforming influence of a teacher and the model that he be guided**

by is ritual and moral principles. Only after this has been accomplished do courtesy and deference develop. Unite these qualities with precepts of good form and reason, and the result is an age of orderly government. If we consider the implications of these facts, it is plain that human nature is evil and that any good in humans is acquired by conscious exertion. [*Xunzi*, III.150-151]

He also rejected Mencius' idea of Heaven as a moral force that oversees human affairs. For Hsün-tzu, Heaven is simply nature, which is impersonal and has no ethical dimension, but operates in accordance with its own laws without regard to individual virtue or human desires.

Yang Hsiung (53 B.C.E.-18 C.E.) stakes out a middle position between Mencius and Hsün-tzu, contending that human nature is a mixture of good and evil. He contends that people become either good or evil as a result of their training: the good cultivate good, while the evil cultivate evil. His treatise helped to focus the attention of Confucian thinkers on this issue, but was criticized by later Confucians for its contention that human nature is partially evil.

**Man's nature is a mixture of good and evil. He who cultivates the good in it will become a good man, and he who cultivates the evil in it will become an evil man. The ch'i [material force] is the driving force that leads one to good or evil.... Therefore the superior man studies hard and practices earnestly. He waits till his good becomes a rare treasure before he sells it. He cultivates his personal life before he makes friends. And he plans well before he acts. This is the way to fulfill the Way. [Fu-yen 3.1a-b]**

## ***NEO-CONFUCIANISM.***

**As noted, in the centuries following Confucius' death, many of his disciples became educators, and as a result Confucian philosophy became a part of the standard curriculum of educated Chinese. Despite its widespread influence, however, the vitality of the tradition languished from the fourth through tenth centuries. Most of the best minds of China were either Taoists or Buddhists, and although Confucianism was widely studied there were few notable interpreters of the tradition.**

**This situation changed dramatically in the eleventh century, when several prominent Confucian philosophers began to revive the tradition. Many of them were influenced by Buddhism and Taoism, and several had been Buddhists in their early years, but they ultimately rejected Buddhism because they considered its doctrine of "emptiness" (*shunyata*) to be nihilistic. They also saw the Buddhist emphasis on monasticism as unnatural, but found that the Confucian tradition valued the family and the norms of traditional Chinese society. A growing number of Confucian thinkers characterized Buddhism as a religion of "barbarians," unsuited to refined Chinese sensibilities, and they found in Confucianism a**

tradition that accorded with the norms and values of cultured Chinese. For example, Han Yü (768-824) was a public official who led a Confucian attack on Buddhism and Taoism and called on the emperor to suppress them. He described Buddhism as a religion of barbarians that is at odds with cultured Chinese sensibilities, and he denounced Taoism as a religion that panders to primitive superstition. In one of his letters, he wrote to the emperor regarding the veneration of a relic of the Buddha. He advised the emperor to reconsider his decision to publicly view a fragment of bone believed to have been left over after the Buddha was cremated, on the grounds that this may seem to the common people to be lending imperial support to the Buddhist practice of relic veneration, which Han Yü considered barbaric.

Among the early figures of this Confucian revival—which is referred to in China as "Study of Nature and Propriety" (*hsing-li-hsüeh*) and by Western scholars as "Neo-Confucianism"—were such prominent philosophers as Chou Tun-i (1017-1073), Shao Yung (1011-1077), Chang Tsai (1020-1077), and the two brothers Ch'eng Hao (1032-1085) and Ch'eng-i (1033-1107). Chou Tun-i (1017-1073) was one of the important early figures in the Neo-Confucian revival that took place during the Sung dynasty



(960-1279). His most significant text was the Explanation of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate (T'ai-chi t'u huo), a short work that equates the "great ultimate" (t'ai-chi) with the "ultimate of non-being" (wu-chi), which he describes as a reality transcending space and time. Its movement generates yang, the active force in nature, and its rest gives rise to yin, the passive element of natural systems. Through the interaction of these two, the "five agents" or "five elements" (wu-hsing) are produced, and the combinations of these elements give rise to the phenomena of the world. Chou conceives of the universe as a dynamic and holistic system in which natural forces and human conduct are interrelated.

The later Neo-Confucian revival is divided by contemporary scholars into two streams, one rationalistic and one idealistic. The major figure of the rationalist tradition was Chu Hsi (1130-1200), while Wang Yang-ming (1427-1529) was the main exponent of the idealists. Confucians of the first group focused on the foundational principles (*li*) of the natural world, human behavior, and society, while the idealists were primarily concerned with how to develop a moral consciousness through training the mind (*hsin*).

**Chu Hsi's philosophy is sometimes referred to as "study of principle" (li hsüeh), because he was concerned with developing understanding of the principles underlying human behavior and social interaction. He believed that society can be rectified through diligent study of the patterns of organization and development that underlie both human civilization and nature. In 1313 Chu Hsi's interpretations of Confucius were officially recognized as the orthodox system of Confucianism and became the basis for civil examinations administered by the government. As a result, they exerted tremendous influence in Chinese education until the abolishment of the system by the Nationalist government in 1905.**

**His philosophy was influenced by Chou Tun-i's Explanation of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate. Chu Hsi interpreted the "ultimate" (chi) as the furthest point that can be reached, and he defined the "great ultimate" (t'ai-chi) as the sum total of the principles of all the phenomena of the universe and the highest principle of each individual thing. According to Chu Hsi, the entire universe is one principle, and he interpreted the notion of "investigation of phenomena" as described in the Great Learning as a procedure of examining things in**

order to become aware of how each phenomenon manifests principle.

He also contended that principle and material force are separate factualities in phenomena, although they are inseparable. Principle is immaterial, unitary, eternal, changeless, and indestructible. He viewed it as constituting the essence of things and as being always good. Material force is the energy that sustains physical things and provides the impetus for their production and transformation. It is corporeal, manifold, changeable, differentiated, and impermanent. It can become either good or evil in accordance with the choices made by human beings.

Wang Yang-ming (1472-1529) was an important opponent of Chu Hsi who lived during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). He was a government official and scholar, as well as an eminent military strategist whose real name was Wang Shou-jen. He became known as Wang Yang-ming because he maintained a retreat in Yang-ming Valley in Chekiang Province. His Inquiry on the Great Learning was his most important work and was widely debated by other Chinese thinkers. In this text he rejects Chu Hsi's explanation of the Great Learning, which places the investigation of things (ko-wu) before making thoughts sincere. Wang placed primary

**emphasis on the study of mind (hsin-hsüeh), which focuses on developing moral awareness through education and ethical instruction.**

**Understanding, Wang contended, comes from within and not through external actions. He believed that knowledge of the good is innate and that principle (li) is a universal factor that is found in human beings as well as natural phenomena. He followed Mencius' idea that human beings are naturally good and that those who fully cultivate their nature are able to overcome selfish tendencies and embrace the truth of the Great Learning.**

**Wang also rejected Chu Hsi's notion that the investigation of things is an examination of external phenomena. Wang contended that goodness is an innate quality of the mind and believed that it involves "eliminating what is incorrect in the mind in order to preserve the correctness of its original nature." For Wang, the investigation of things entails an ethical imperative to put moral standards into practice and cultivate one's character.**

**\* \* \* \***

# TAOISM

## *THE LIFE OF LAO TZU.*

The origins of Taoism lie in popular religious practices and ideas of ancient China. According to popular Taoist belief, the earliest codification of the central concepts of the tradition was set forth by Lao-tzu, who according to legend was a sage who lived in the sixth century B.C.E. and who worked as an archivist in the state of Lu. A number of contemporary scholars believe that Lao-tzu (whose name means "Old Master") may not have been a historical figure. In addition, there is significant textual evidence that the work attributed to him is actually comprised of materials from different authors and compiled centuries after he lived. His historicity is doubted because there is little solid evidence that he ever lived and considerable confusion among the sources that mention him. According to the record composed by the historian *Ssu-ma Ch'ien* (154-80 B.C.E.), Lao-tzu was reportedly born in a small village in southern China in the later period of the Chou dynasty. His surname was Li, and his personal name was Er. He worked as an archivist for most of his life but, after becoming concerned with what he perceived as a degeneration of his

society, Lao-tzu decided to leave through the Western Gate, which marked the boundary of China. According to *Ssu-ma Ch'ien*, he was not heard from again. In later times, however, numerous sightings of Lao-tzu were reported, and a wealth of legends concerning this mysterious figure circulated throughout China.

Lao-tzu cultivated the Tao and the Virtue. His teaching focused on remaining apart [from society] and avoiding fame. After living under the Chou for a long time, he saw that the Chou was in decline, and he decided to leave. When he reached the pass [on the western frontier of China], Yin Hsi, the Guardian of the Pass, said, 'Since you are about to completely withdraw, I ask you to write a text for me. Lao-tzu thus composed a book in two sections which described the meaning of the Tao and the Virtue in more than five thousand characters. He then left. No one knows what became of him. [*Shih-chi*, p. 63.2142]

According to traditional sources, Lao-tzu was an older contemporary of Confucius, and the two supposedly met on several occasions. When

**Taoist texts report their meetings, Lao-tzu is portrayed as utterly surpassing Confucius in his understanding of Tao and as admonishing him to give up his attachment to rituals, propriety, and learning and embrace simplicity. Not surprisingly, Confucian sources portray Confucius as the victor. In Ssu-ma ch'ien's history, Confucius comes to Lao-tzu for instruction on the proper performance of rituals, but is advised instead to give up his rigidity and affectations and embrace Tao.**

**There are other equally imaginative accounts of Lao-tzu. When Buddhism first arrived in China, many Taoists welcomed it as a kindred system, but over time rivalries between the two traditions developed, although they continued to borrow from each other. In one particular text,, a Taoist author claims that the Buddha was really Lao-tzu, who traveled to India after passing through the Western Gate. He intended to teach them the essence of Taoism, but soon realized that they were only capable of understanding the "Lesser Way," an inferior version of his teaching suitable for barbarians. The author reflects traditional Chinese attitudes toward non-Chinese peoples, who are seen as savages.**

## ***THE TAO TE CHING.***

**Regarded by Taoist tradition as their oldest sacred text, the Tao Te Ching is attributed to Lao-tzu and, as indicated in the earlier quote, was purportedly composed at the request of the gatekeeper Yin-his as Lao-tzu was leaving China. Initially reluctant to commit his ideas to writing because words inevitably distort the truth, Lao-tzu eventually agreed and summarized the essentials of what later came to be Taoist philosophy. Containing about five thousand characters, it is also popularly known as "The Five Thousand Character Classic." Modern versions of the text are divided into two sections, the first of which describes the Tao, while the second is concerned with how rulers should follow the way of Tao in order to rule wisely and well. Some contemporary scholars believe that the text we have today is not in fact a unitary work, but instead contains materials from various periods. It is widely believed to have been compiled during the Warring States Period, around 250 B.C.E., and the earliest known version of the text dates back to the beginning of the Han dynasty (202-220). It has also been the subject of numerous commentaries, many of which may still be found today in the Taoist canon.**



It should be noted that the text makes no claim to originality. Rather, Lao-tzu stresses that his thoughts accord with those of the sages of the past and merely recapitulate the wisdom found by all who understand the subtle and profound workings of the universe. His text has two primary concerns: the Way (*tao*) and Virtue or Power (*te*), which is connected with its manifest operations. The Tao is described as a universal force, subtle and omnipresent, that gives rise to all things and provides their sustenance. It is the vital energy that makes all life possible, and it pervades the entire universe, providing a pattern for the growth and development of living things.

Transcending and embracing all dichotomies, the Tao is comprised of two opposite but complementary polarities, *yin* and *yang*. Originally these terms seem to have referred to the shady and sunny side of mountains, respectively. *Yin* is described as yielding, wet, passive, dark, and feminine, while *yang* is said to be aggressive, dry, active, light, and masculine. These distinctions are said to reflect distinctive tendencies within natural systems, but they are not diametrically opposed. Rather, each contains elements of the other, and their interaction provides the creative and dynamic

**force behind the changes that occur in the natural world.**

**The Tao is ineffable. It transcends all sense experience and all thought. It may, however, be understood by the sage who becomes open to it and thus "becomes one with the Great Thoroughfare." The primary obstacle to this attainment is the senses, in combination with the intellect, which trick people into thinking that ordinary perceptions and cognitions provide a true picture of reality. Those who seek to become sages are counseled to empty themselves, to cast off learning, reasoning, words, and intellection. In this way they become open to direct experience of Tao, through which they can find true harmony with their environment and enjoy a long and tranquil life.**

**The workings of Tao tend toward harmony and balance, and whenever any part of a natural system develops extreme qualities, this imbalance triggers a corresponding backlash. This is true of natural phenomena and human beings. Imbalances in nature are corrected by automatic reactions, and the more extreme the imbalance, the more powerful will be the reaction. Similar principles operate in individual human lives and the actions of collectives. Any person or group that develops extreme qualities or that disturbs the natural**

harmony of the world will reap corresponding consequences, which will inevitably right the balance of nature. Thus the Taoist sage goes along with the operations of the Tao, not forcing things, and so is able to live long and peacefully. Those who do not understand this principle are doomed to waste their vital energies in fruitless aggression and activity, like a strong swimmer who pushes against a current but eventually becomes exhausted and is carried downstream.

Lao-tzu compares human beings at birth to uncarved blocks of wood (*p'u*), with rough edges and unsymmetrical, like natural phenomena that have not been tampered with. Confucians shared this idea, but while they proposed to carve the block in order to properly socialize it, Lao-tzu sees this notion as profoundly misguided. Humans at birth are supple and yielding, full of life energy, but through the process of acculturation they are placed into artificial molds and unnatural situations, which dissipate their energies in useless activities. Those who allow themselves to become caught up in the rat race inevitably wear themselves down and become like withered, dead branches—hard, stiff, and unyielding—and so shorten their lifespans.

According to Lao-tzu, the operations of Tao may be compared to the movement of water.

**When water encounters a hard obstacle like a rock, it simply flows around it, rather than battering against it. Water, which is soft and yielding, does not contend against obstacles placed in its way, but instead moves around them, finding the path of least resistance. As it does this, however, it also slowly and inexorably wears down the resistance of even the hardest rock, and over the course of time overcomes all obstacles and may even create deep chasms in solid rock. Similarly, the sage avoids direct confrontation and goes along with the natural flow of Tao, practicing the Taoist virtue of "non-action" (*wu wei*). A person who perfects this technique appears to do nothing, but in reality moves with the natural rhythms of the world, thus working in accordance with the Tao to promote harmony and prosperity.**

### *Wang Pi's Commentary.*

Wang-pi (226-249), author of the most influential commentary on the *Tao Te Ching*, is renowned in China as one of the foremost representatives of the Dark Learning (hsüan hsüeh) school of Chinese philosophy. This school is based on the "Three Dark Texts": the I ching, the Tao Te Ching, and the Chuang-tzu. The philosophers of the Dark Learning school proposed to return to the ancient classics, whose ideas they mingled with Confucian notions about the ideal society and Taoist metaphysics. One of Wang-pi's original contributions to Chinese thought was the notion of "original non-being" (pen-wu), according to which prior to the creation of the universe there was only undifferentiated non-being.

All being originates from nonbeing. Therefore, the time before there were physical shapes and names is the beginning of the myriad beings. When shapes and names are there, [the Tao] raises them, educates them, adjusts them, and causes their end. It serves as their mother. The text [the *Tao Te Ching*] means that the Tao produces and completes beings on the basis of the formless and the nameless. They are produced and completed but do not know how or why. [*Lao-tzu* 1.1.1a]

**From original non-being arose the One, another way of conceiving the Tao. From the One arose the Two, and from this came the myriad things of the universe.**

## ***CHUANG-TZU.***

**After Lao-tzu, Chuang-tzu is the second main figure of "philosophical Taoism." He is believed to have lived during the fourth century B.C.E, although little is known about his life except for the enigmatic descriptions found in his own works. Ssu-ma ch'ien reports that he lived in the southern country of Meng, in modern-day Henan, and that he died around 290 B.C.E. He is said to have held a minor government post but refused any offers of higher office, preferring to retain his autonomy and personal freedom. According to his own account, he sought to live apart from his society, refusing honors and political involvement, and cultivated the virtue of "uselessness," which enabled him to move unmolested in the world and to attain a state of harmony with the Tao.**

**Chuang-tzu lived in Meng. His given name was Chou. Chou once worked as a functionary at Ch'i-yüan in Meng. He was a contemporary of King Hui of Liang (r. 370-335 B.C.E.) and King Hsüan of Ch'i (r. 342-324 B.C.E.) There was nothing his teachings did not consider, and their essence hearkened back to the words of Lao-tzu. His texts, comprising more than 100,000 characters, all used allegories.... He mocked people like Confucius and elucidated the**

meanings of Lao-tzu.... and he was adept at creating texts with hidden allusions and analogies. He used them to attack the Confucians and followers of Mo-tzu. Even the greatest scholars of his day could not defend themselves against him. His words flowed and swirled freely, at his whim, and powerful people could not use him, including kings, dukes, and others. [*Shih-chi* 63.2144]

Chuang-tzu shares similar views with Lao-tzu on the workings of Tao and the way of the sage. Where Lao-tzu's text uses terse aphorisms to make its points, however, Chuang-tzu tells stories that describe the way of the sage. Many of these have bizarre characters and strange situations, and they are pervaded by a subtle humor that gently mocks the ordinary ways of the world and the concerns of human society.

Chuang-tzu also differs from Lao-tzu in that he has little interest in applying Taoist principles in the political arena. The second half of Lao-tzu's text is concerned with how rulers should act and the principles of good governance, while Chuang-tzu repeatedly emphasizes his utter disinterest in becoming involved in such matters. Rather, Chuang-tzu counsels his readers to



cultivate uselessness, since things that are truly useless cannot be used by others and thus are left alone. Chuang-tzu indicates that Tao is everywhere and in everything, and that those who truly know it understand that it pervades even the lowest and most despised parts of the world. Most people waste their energies striving and planning for the future, and so fail to live in the moment. Sages, however, learn to move with the flow of Tao, and so they lead long and peaceful lives. The sage, according to Chuang-tzu, moves unobtrusively among the hustle and bustle of the world, living at the margins of society, and is generally not even recognized as a sage by his or her contemporaries.

A central theme of Chuang-tzu's philosophy is the limitations of language. Those who become caught up in expressions and concepts inevitably fail to recognize truth, which cannot be captured in words. Chuang-tzu teaches that most problems come from entanglement with words and concepts. As an antidote, he advises that we "unlearn" the lessons that others have taught us "for our own good." Ideas of morality, justice, truth, etc. merely confuse people and make them think of doing the opposite. To counteract this, an important meditative practice is "sitting and forgetting" (tso-wang), in which one simply lets thoughts flow freely, in

harmony with Tao, and thus artificial concepts disperse of their own accord. A person who perfects this is able to attain the state of "free and easy wandering" in which one acts spontaneously, in accordance with the impulses of the moment. A person who is in harmony with Tao is able to move freely in the world, unharmed by things that injure ordinary people. In one passage, Chuang-tzu falls asleep and dreams that he is a butterfly, but when he awakes he is unsure whether he is Chuang-tzu or a butterfly dreaming of being Chuang-tzu. The passage exemplifies the way that Chuang-tzu merges dreams and waking "reality" while indicating that the boundaries between the two are not as rigid as ordinary people assume.

Throughout his life, Chuang-tzu avoided all attempts to make himself useful to his society. When offered important positions, he turned them down, preferring instead to live in the moment, unharried by the concerns of busy and important people. According to Chuang-tzu, the sage completely transcends the limitations felt by ordinary beings, and cares nothing for their judgements. The sage moves in the world without becoming attached to anything. Living in the moment, he or she simply takes things as they come, and so is at peace. Ordinary people,

by contrast, are full of desires, cares, and worries, and so fail to realize their potential.

Chuang-tzu's friend, the logician Hui-tzu, is a favorite target of the subtle humor for which Chuang-tzu is famous. Portrayed as a philosopher who is fond of hair-splitting distinctions, Hui-tzu is chided by his friend for becoming overly attached to logic and words and thus failing to embrace the myriad mysteries of the natural world. In one passage, Hui-tzu attempts to turn the tables on Chuang-tzu, suggesting that despite his friend's emphasis on naturalness what he advocates is really contrary to nature. Human beings naturally have feelings of attachment toward certain things and aversion toward others, and it is absurd to suggest that anyone can truly view all things as equal. In his writings, Chuang-tzu frequently extols the value of becoming useless. Those who make themselves useful are used by others, and so they dissipate their vital energies and die young. The sage, however, appears to be stupid and blockish, and so others believe that he is useless, and so they leave him alone. Since death is an inevitable part of life, the sage embraces it along with other aspects of the natural world. For most people, death is fearful and oppressive, but for the sage death is part of

**the cosmic mystery constantly unfolding around us.**

## ***RELIGIOUS TAOISM.***

**The establishment of Taoism as a distinctive religious tradition dates back to 142 C.E., when Chang Tao-ling received the first of a series of revelations from T'ai-shang Lao-chün, Lord Lao the Most High. This deity is the personification of the Tao and is believed by Taoist tradition to be Lao-tzu, who in reality was a human form taken by the Tao in order to teach the truth to human beings. Chang Tao-ling began to spread the teachings he had received and established the first organized Taoist system, named True Unity of Celestial Masters. Because of his connection with the first revelation, he was recognized as the first of the Celestial Masters, the patriarchs of the school.**

**The tradition continues today. The sixty-fourth Celestial Master currently resides in Taiwan and is considered to be the direct descendant of Chang Tao-ling. The Celestial Masters tradition traces its philosophical roots back to the works of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu, and it has also developed into a communal religion that emphasizes rituals for purification and exorcism, along with teachings on morality.**

**Contemporary scholars commonly distinguish two main streams of Taoist thought: the system of the philosophers of the fourth and third**

centuries B.C.E. is termed "philosophical Taoism," and the later tradition that was concerned with techniques leading to immortality is termed "religious Taoism." While this division does capture an important distinction of emphases within the tradition, it is also overly simplistic. Taoism has a long and complex history that has produced numerous strands of thought and practice, and recent research has shown that elements of the "religious" strand may be found in the works of the early "philosophical" Taoists, and texts of "religious" Taoism are strongly influenced by the thought of "philosophical" Taoists.

According to legend, Ho-shang Kung, the Master on the River, lived during the reign of the Han emperor Wen (179-156 B.C.E.), but the earliest dated stories of his life come from the third century C.E. He is said to have lived near the Yellow River, where he studied the Tao Te Ching in solitude. Eventually he came to the attention of the emperor, who asked him to teach the essentials of Lao-tzu's text. He indicates how the ideas of the Tao Te Ching became mingled with immortality practices such as breathing exercises and gymnastics. In the system of Ho-shang Kung, people receive vital energy (ch'i) from Heaven, but they ordinarily dissipate it unless they practice special

techniques to keep it stored in the vital organs. As the Taoist tradition developed, Lao-tzu's successors developed techniques for incorporating his doctrines into religious practice.

Religious traditions also drew from Chuang-tzu who in one passage offers a description of the sage which indicates that understanding of Tao makes a person godlike, able to fly and to transcend death. Also, in Chuang-tzu's stories there are several mentions of the "immortals" (*hsien*), who are said to live on a remote mountain (or, according to other accounts, on a hidden island). They avoid eating cereals, guard their vital energies, and are able to fly through the air. While most people dissipate their vital energies through involvement in mundane affairs, worry, and eating unhealthy foods, the immortals practice physical regimens that safeguard the life force (*ch'i*), while also avoiding activities and environments that weaken it. The search for immortality was an important concern of the developed Taoist tradition, which created elaborate systems of practice designed to promote long life. Among these were physical exercises that emulated the movements of long-lived animals (who were considered to be naturally adept at guarding vital energies), special diets that were believed to

**promote the cultivation of energy, and chemical elixirs designed to replenish lost energy. Many of these elixirs contained cinnabar (mercuric sulfide), a red colored liquid metal that was widely believed to contain a high concentration of vital energy.**

**Taoist masters also developed systems of meditative practices designed to promote longevity, such as "meditation on the One" (*shou-i*), in which one guards the vital energies, concentrating on the universal life force emanated by the Tao. This practice culminates in an ecstatic vision of multicolored light. Other techniques described five primary energy centers in the body, each of which was inhabited by a particular god. Meditators were advised to increase the energy levels in these centers by safeguarding the energy drawn into the body through breathing, by avoiding grains, by ingesting specific medicinal plants, and by medical techniques such as acupuncture and control of the pulse.**

**Perhaps the most controversial of the long-life practices developed over the centuries are various sexual techniques (*fang-chung*) that were believed to increase one's store of energy. Sexual practices for men often include ways to increase yang energy, while females are taught how to increase yin energy. Many of these**



describe a sort of sexual vampirism in which the energy of the partner is transferred to the practitioner. In other texts, it appears that the sexual practices awaken and augment one's natural energy. The following passage is written for men, who are advised to take as many sexual partners as possible, and that they should ideally be in their early teens, since young women have a greater store of energy. They are also counseled to avoid partners who are familiar with these techniques, since female adepts may turn the tables on them and take their energy. The procedure for women is similar to that for men: they are advised to have as many partners as possible, and that they should ideally be young, since the young have a greater store of energy. Women should avoid becoming aroused, since orgasm dissipates the energies cultivated by sexual activity. Those who succeed in restraining themselves will acquire the energy dissipated by their partners through seminal emission.

In the texts of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu there are suggestions that sages transcend the world and that its cares no longer burden them. This theme was developed in other Taoist texts that extol the prowess of the "Great Man" (ta jen), who is portrayed as a mighty figure traveling in the remote corners of the world—and the highest

reaches of heaven—without obstruction, complete master of all things. He wanders to the farthest reaches of the cosmos, visiting strange and mysterious realms and acquiring esoteric knowledge, along with substances that promote immortality.

Although the position of women was well below that of men in classical China, there are many stories of female sages in the Taoist canon. These women managed to transcend the boundaries imposed on them by their society. Applying esoteric lore in secret, they became recognized as teachers, and sometimes even as immortals. The following selection, from a collection of stories of immortals from the Han dynasty, reports on the life of the "Lady of Great Mystery," who is said to have successfully practiced the secret arts of immortality and to have ascended to heaven in broad daylight, a sign of exceptional accomplishment. Sun Bu-er, known in Taoist literature as "Clear and Calm Free Human," lived during the twelfth century. Perhaps the best-known of Taoist women immortals, externally she lived an unremarkable life, raising three children and performing the duties expected of a Chinese wife. At the age of fifty-one she undertook the training of Taoist immortality practices, and it is reported that she quickly mastered difficult

**esoteric techniques. She composed a number of texts on immortality, most of which focus on distinctive techniques for women. A central concern is harnessing the vital energy and causing it to move up along the spine through subtle energy channels, and thus to the top of the head. It then cascades down the front of the body, bringing indescribable bliss and restoring vitality. The verses are written in a code using the terminology of the Taoist immortalists, and so an explanatory commentary by Chen Yang-ming, a twentieth-century Taoist master, is included.**

## ***TAOIST SCRIPTURES.***

Given the long and varied history of Taoism and the range of concerns of Taoist authors, it is not surprising that the Taoist canon (*tao-tsang*) contains a great variety of texts. All traditions of Taoism trace their origins back to the works of Lao-tzu, Chuang-tzu, and other early masters such as Lieh-tzu. Later developments incorporate their ideas and symbols, although they often diverge from their systems in significant ways. Moreover, despite the importance of these early masters for the later tradition, the development of the religion of Taoism took place many centuries after their deaths. The dawn of an organized religion of Taoism was the second century C.E., and it can be traced back to the movements of the Great Peace (T'ai-p'ing) and the Celestial Masters, which formed around charismatic leaders and spread throughout China, both among common people and the cultural and political elite.

During the fourth and fifth centuries, Taoism became a widely popular tradition which appealed to all classes of Chinese society, and it is during this time that it began to develop a distinctive collection of scriptures. The earliest listing of Taoist texts was attempted by Pan-ku (32-92), in his *History of the Han*(*Han shu*), but it was not until the latter part of the fifth

century that the first comprehensive catalogue of Taoist scriptures was prepared by Lu Hsiu-ching (406-477). Sponsored by Sung Ming-ti (r. 465-477), he compiled the *Index to the Scriptures of the Three Caverns* (*San-tung ching-shu mu-lu*), which he presented to the emperor in 471. Now lost, this massive compilation was said to have listed over 1,200 fascicles (*chuan*), including philosophical texts, alchemical works, and descriptions of talismans.

The next important listing of Taoist literature was prepared by order of Emperor T'ang Hsüan-tsung (r. 713-756), who believed himself to be a direct descendant of Lao-tzu (who by this time was widely regarded as a celestial deity). The emperor ordered a search throughout his empire for all existing Taoist literature, which was eventually brought together in a collection called *Sublime Compendium of the Three Caverns* (*San-tung Ch'iung-kang*), which is said to have comprised 3,700 texts. He had a number of copies made of the collection, which were then stored in Taoist temples. Shortly after this, however, the imperial libraries of the capitals of Ch'ang-an and Lo-yang were destroyed during the An Lu-shan and Shih Ssu-ming rebellions, with the result that much of this huge collection was also lost.

Another compilation was ordered during the Sung dynasty (960-1279). Sung Chen-tsung (r. 998-1022) ordered his advisor Wang Ch'in-jo (962-1025) to compile a catalog of existing Taoist literature, and later Chang Chün-fang (ca. 1008-1029) headed a team of Taoist priests who compiled a collection of Taoist scriptures called *Precious Canon of the Celestial Palace of the Great Sung* (*Sung t'ien-kung pao-tsang*), which had 4,565 titles. This is regarded by the tradition as the first definitive edition of the Taoist canon.

During subsequent dynasties other compilations of the Taoist canon were prepared. The latest version of the canon was printed in 1926, with the sponsorship of the Nationalist government. Consisting of 1120 fascicles, it is the largest collection of Taoist literature ever completed. Fu Tseng-hsiang (1872-1950), a former minister of education, convinced President Hsü Shih-ch'ang (1855-1939) to allocate government funds to preserve this literature. Based on the collection of the White Cloud Abbey (Pai-yün Kuan) of Beijing, it is believed to be descended from an edition of the canon prepared in 1445, and later emended in 1845.

Since the compilation of the canon by Lu Hsiu-ching in 471, editions of the *Tao-tsang* have traditionally followed his division of Taoist texts

into the "Three Caverns": (1) Cavern of Perfection (*tung-chen*), which derives from the Supreme Clarity (*shang-ch'ing*) texts; (2) Cavern of Mystery (*tung-hsüan*), which derives from the Numinous Treasure (*ling-pao*) literature; and (3) Cavern of Spirit (*tung-shen*), which is based on the texts collectively called "Three Kings" (*san-huang*). This division appears to be patterned on the division of Buddhist teachings into the Three Vehicles.

In addition to this central division, the Taoist canon also contains other texts, such as the "Four Supplements" (*ssu-fu*), which follow the Three Caverns, named respectively *Great Mystery* (*t'ai-hsüan*), *Great Peace* (*t'ai-p'ing*), *Great Purity* (*t'ai-ch'ing*), and *True Unity* (*cheng-i*). The first three of these have traditionally been regarded as supplements to the Three Caverns, although in fact their origins are believed by contemporary scholars to have been composed in reference to other texts. The *Great Mystery* supplement is based on the *Tao Te Ching*, The *Great Peace*, *Great Purity*, and *True Unity* collections appear to be based on the *Scripture on the Great Peace* (*T'ai-p'ing ching*), the *Great Purity* (*T'ai-ch'ing*) texts on alchemy, and the True Unity or Celestial Masters tradition.

As Taoist literature developed, other texts found their way into the canon that did not fit neatly into the early divisions, and as a result the canon was further subdivided. In the modern canon, each of the Three Caverns is divided into twelve sections: (1) original revelations; (2) celestial talismans; (3) commentaries; (4) sacred diagrams; (5) histories and genealogies; (6) codes of conduct; (7) rules for ceremonies; (8) outlines of rituals; (9) techniques for alchemy, geomancy, and numerology; (10) hagiographical works; (11) hymns and prayers; and (12) memorial addresses. Despite the apparently detailed nature of this division, individual sections contain a range of literature, and individual texts within a given division may not correspond to the general category.

In addition to the *Tao-tsang*, another important compilation of Taoist scriptures should be mentioned, the *Edition of Essentials from the Taoist Canon* (*Tao-tsang chi-yao*), a smaller collection of texts compiled during the Ch'ing dynasty (1644-1912). The 1906 edition of this corpus contains 287 titles, including works attributed to Sun bu-er, some of whose writings are excerpted below. These two collections of scriptures contain hundreds of rituals for renewal (*chaio*), funeral liturgies (*chai*), philosophical texts, cosmological treatises,



**rituals for festivals and healing, discussions of external and internal alchemy, medical literature, meditation texts, descriptions for identification and preparation of healing herbs and roots, mythological stories and hagiographies of great Taoist masters and immortals, and a variety of other types of literature.**

**\* \* \* \***

## SHINTO

In ancient Japan there was no term for indigenous religious practices, but when Buddhism was introduced to the country in the sixth century the term Shinto, or "way of the *kami*," was coined in order to differentiate Japanese traditions from the foreign faith (which was labeled *butsudo*, or "way of the Buddha"). The *kami* are the indigenous gods of Japan, and Shinto is a general term referring to religious practices relating to them. Shinto has no founder, no organization based on believers' adherence to particular doctrines, and no beliefs or practices that are required of all. In contemporary Japan, Shinto is most visibly practiced at the many shrines found throughout the country, in popular festivals and pilgrimages, and in the continuing manifestations of reverence for the forces inhabiting the natural world that are celebrated in prayers and offerings to the *kami*.

The Japanese have traditionally believed that their country is the residence of many powerful beings and that these beings directly influence the lives of humans, as well as natural phenomena. *Kami* are commonly associated with natural forces, such as wind and storms,

**with awe-inspiring places, such as mountains, waterfalls, and rivers, and with spirits of deceased humans. For example, Mount Fuji is widely viewed in Japan as a particularly sacred place and as the abode of powerful kami.**

## ***MYTHOLOGY.***

**According to the Shinto mythology, the first beings to arise in the world were three kami. They were followed by two more kami, and the five together became the progenitors of all the other kami. Most kami have a delineated sphere of influence, and their worship generally centers on a particular shrine or area. Other kami have a national significance and are venerated throughout Japan. Shinto mythology describes that when the earth was newly formed, the islands of Japan were still below the waters, and Izanami and Izanagi decided to create a special land. They thrust a spear into the waters, and the brine that dripped from it formed the islands of the Japanese archipelago. After this they united, and their union resulted in the birth of more kami. A Shinto myth describes how Izanagi, longing for his deceased love, decided to visit her in the land of the dead and plead with her to return with him. When he saw her body putrefying and covered with maggots, however, he ran away in horror and purified himself by bathing. The drops of water from his eyes and nose produced three kami: Amaterasu, Tsukiyomi (the moon god), and Susa no o.**

**The most prominent kami is the sun goddess, Amaterasu Omikami (Great Heavenly Illuminating Goddess), who in ancient myths is**